

Chapter 1

Causes and Consequences of Kazakh Migration from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey: 1930s–1950s

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Abstract

In this paper, we address reasons for and results of the Kazakhs' migration from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey from the 1930s to the 1950s. The migration's main cause was closely related to Sun Yat-sen's 1911 Chinese revolution, which ended the four-century Manchu Empire and created a void of authority in Eastern Turkestan. The difficult and oppressive administration of Eastern Turkestan's governors during the republican era forced the Kazakhs both to rebel against the governors and to emigrate to countries living more freely. Thus, two waves of exodus occurred, the first in the late 1930s and the second in the early 1950s. The Kazakh rebellion led by Osman Batur, which erupted between 1940 and 1950, before the second migration, is beyond this discussion.¹ Two migratory movements occurred at intervals of approximately ten years, both ending in Turkey from 1952 to 1954. As a result, the Kazakh diaspora and culture has emerged in Turkey and various European countries.

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¹ For the rebellion of Osman Batur, see Abdüraqap Qara, *Azattıqtıñ öshpes rukhi Nūrghozhay Batırdıñ estelikterı zhāne Ospan Batır* (Almaty: Sardar, 2008); Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944–1949* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1990); David D. Wang, *Under the Soviet Shadow: The Yining Incident; Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944–1949* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999).



1. Governors of Eastern Turkestan in the Republican Era

Chinese governors who served as governors in Eastern Turkestan in the first half of the 20th century were the following:

1. Yang Zengxin (1912–28)
2. Jin Shuren (1928–33)
3. Sheng Shicai (1933–44) was the most bloody and cruel.

During these three governors' administrations, Kazakhs in Eastern Turkestan were increasingly subjected to atrocities, and they lost their previously peaceful environment as a result of these Chinese rulers' repressive regimes, through taxation and political and military politics. Kazakhs who opposed persecution by these oppressive rulers were savagely punished.

2. Reasons for Migration

Previous to migration, the nomadic Kazakhs lived by animal husbandry. Although Eastern Turkestan was under the Beijing government's dominion, the Kazakhs lived an autonomous life in their pastoral region. During the Manchu administration, they had their own rulers with titles of *uang* or *güng*, *beysä*, *täyzhǎ*, *ükirday*, *zalıng* and *zänggǎ*, *zhüzbası* and *auılbası*.² And it cannot be said that Beijing fully controlled the area. Especially after Sun Yat-sen's revolution overthrew the Manchu Dynasty in 1911, Chinese governors appointed from the center acted independently, and sometimes they entered close relations with Soviet Russia, then ruled by Stalin, who wanted to dominate the region.³ Pressure and persecution increased because the governors wanted to strengthen their dominance over the Uyghurs and Kazakhs in

² Zhaqşılıq Sämitüli, *Qıtaydagı Qazaqtar* (Almaty: Düniezhüzi Qazaqtarınıñ qauımdastıghı, 2000), 47, 69–70; Linda Benson and Ingvar Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazaks* (Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 43; Ingvar Svanberg, "The Nomadism of Orta Ĵüz Kazaks in Xinjiang 1911–1949," in *The Kazaks of China: Essays on an Ethnic Minority*, ed. Linda Benson and Ingvar Svanberg (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1988), 119; Zardıkhān Qınayatüli, "Monggholiya Qazaqtarı," in *Qazaq diasporası: bügün men ertengı* (Astana: Elorda, 2005), 99–102; Konstantin L. Syroezhkin, ed., *Sovremennyyı Sin'tszyan i ego mesto v kazakhstansko-kitaıskikh otnosheniyakh* (Almaty: Fond Evrazii, 1997), 96–109.

³ Hans Bräker, "Çin-Sovyet İlişkilerinde Milliyet Hareketleri," *Stratejik Açidan Sovyet Müslümanları ve Diğer Azınlıklar*, haz., S. Enders Wimbush, çev., Yuluğ Tekin Kurat (Ankara: Yeni Forum Yayınları, 1988), 183–98; Nābizhan Mūqametkhanūli, "Qıtaydagı Qazaq qauımdastıghınıñ qalıptastuı," in *Qazaq diasporası*, 132–39.

the region. Finally, this situation exceeded the limits of tolerance, especially during the rule of the Chinese governors Jin Shuren (1928–33) and Sheng Shicai (1933–44).⁴

During this period, education in the Kazakh language was restricted, and the native people were increasingly taxed. Indigenous people's lands were confiscated and divided among Chinese immigrants. People were executed for even the smallest of crimes. After prominent community leaders were arrested, the Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the region revolted. Although these rebellions led to short-term success, they could not continue to confront the Governor's forces that were so superior in numbers and equipment. This led the nomadic Kazakh people to decide to migrate to areas where they could live freely.

3. Stages of Migration

The Kazakhs did not directly emigrate from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey; instead, their migration took place over a long 17 years from 1935 to 1952. The first stage was the migration of Kazakhs from the repression of Sheng Shicai, the Governor of Eastern Turkestan, to the Gansu Province under the control of Dungan or Hui, Chinese Muslims.

When school education in the Kazakh language was halted and the leading Kazakhs were arrested in 1935, the Kazakhs living in the Qumul and Barköl regions started looking for an escape from oppression. Some Kazakh leaders, for instance, Mäzhen Shanya [Ch. *Xiangyue*: administrative chief], Erenkhan, Eliskhan Täyzhı, and Zäyıp Täyzhı, held a secret congress in Qoysu in August 1935. They decided to seek help from the Chinese Muslim General Ma Bufang, warlord of Gansu and Qinghai provinces, against the forces of Sheng Shicai, Governor of Eastern Turkestan.⁵

However, there was no way to obtain such aid. Thereupon a group of Kazakhs led by Eliskhan Täyzhı emigrated to Gansu in the spring of 1936. However, this first phase of migration was not easy because of a clash with Chinese soldiers dispatched by Governor Sheng Shicai. Still, the migrants succeeded in reaching Gansu, where they were well received and shown hospitality by the Dungans. Three

⁴ Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Doğu Türkistan'daki Harp Beyleri: Doğu Türkistan'ın 1911–1949 Arası Siyasi Tarihi* çev., Enver Can (İstanbul: Doğu Türkistan Vakfı, 1991), 62–296; Gul'nara M. Mendikulova, *Istoricheskie sud'by Kazakhskoi diaspori: Proiskhozhdenie i razvitie* (Almaty: Ghilim, 1997), 113–22; Dälelkhan Zhanaltay, *Qılı zaman – Qıın künder* (Almaty: Dünieszüzı Qazaqtarınıñ qauımdastıghı, 2000), 25–58.

⁵ Hızır Bek Gayretullah, *Altaylarda Kanlı Günler* (İstanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaası, 1977), 26.

months later, the second group of Kazakhs headed by Zäyıp Täyzhı emigrated from Barköl to Gansu.⁶

Migration of Kazakhs from Barköl and surroundings to Gansu created great excitement among the Kazakhs in Altay since they were also oppressed under Sheng Shicai. This oppression further increased after the Barköl Kazakhs migrated to Gansu. Therefore, in November 1938, Kazakh leaders of Altay held a meeting in the house of Nürghali Bi, with leaders Äyımbet, Qūsayın Täyzhı [Hüseyin Teyci], and Sūltanshärıp [Sultan Şerif] attending. At this meeting, they also decided to immigrate to Gansu. However, Governor Sheng Shicai, who was aware of and opposed this decision, sent troops with air support. Despite fierce fighting, the Kazakhs were able to reach Gansu, where the Altay Kazakhs met with Kazakhs under the leadership of Elıskhan and Zäyıp Täyzhı, who had previously emigrated to the Yu'erhun region of Gansu.⁷ This convergence caused rejoicing and excitement. Thus, Kazakhs from Barköl, Qumul, and Altay regions gathered in Gansu where, for the time being, they were safe from Sheng Shicai's oppression.⁸

Thus did the Kazakhs begin their peaceful days in Gansu, but this calm did not last more than two years. In Nanjing, Chiang Kai-shek's government had begun to pressure Chinese Muslim General Ma to send the Kazakhs back to their homeland. Still Ma did not follow the government's instructions because, on one hand, China was experiencing internal disturbances, and on the other, it was at war with Japan. When the Nanjing government could not influence Ma, it turned to Ma Bukang, the commander of the Suzhou region where the Kazakhs lived. Then, through Ma Bukang, Nanjing put pressure on the Kazakhs. Using various excuses, Ma Bukang began to confiscate the Kazakhs' horses and guns. Observing Ma Bukang's increasing pressure, Kazakh leaders held a meeting in Elıskhan Täyzhı's house and decided to emigrate from Qinghai to the free world because of the commander's unfriendly behavior.⁹

So began a second phase, with the Kazakhs emigrating from Qinghai to India. This migration faced many obstacles. First of all, Ma Bukang wanted to stop them, so he sent troops, commanded by Han Jinbao, to Elıskhan's convoy already on

⁶ Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 27–34.

⁷ Khalifa Altay, *Altaydan aughan el* (Almaty, 2000), 15–28.

⁸ Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 37–40.

⁹ Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 47–49.

its way to Tibet and, with various promises, convinced them to return in May 1939. The Kazakhs were told that if they returned to Yu'erhun, they would live comfortably without pressure, as in the old days. But the Kazakhs were required to hand over their weapons. On the way back to Yu'erhun, Han Jinbao arrested Eliskhan Täyzhǐ and others, who had given up their guns, when the convoy was taking a break in the plain of Balong. During the night, however, when the soldiers fell asleep, the Kazakhs rescued Eliskhan and his friends, attacking and killing Commander Han Jinbao and his soldiers with axes, shovels, stones, and sticks. Again, they began to emigrate toward Tibet.¹⁰

After this event, other Kazakhs in Qinghai could not stay there. Zäyǐp Täyzhǐ and his friends met and decided to migrate to India via Tibet following Eliskhan Täyzhǐ. The group left in September 1939, and after difficulties getting there, the two groups met in the Nagqu district of Tibet. On the way, they clashed from time to time with Chinese and Tibetan soldiers who wanted to block them. The Kazakhs ability to fight and use weapons has played an important role in overcoming such obstacles. Besides human opposition, the Kazakhs had to deal with severe natural conditions. Many people including, notably, Zäyǐp Täyzhǐ, a prominent immigration leader died from lack of oxygen in the high-altitude peaks of Tibet. They also battled winter conditions of extreme cold, heavy snow, and bad storms. The most difficult for them was digging graves in the frozen, rocky soil. After all these difficulties, the Kazakh convoy reached the Indian border in September 1941.¹¹

The third phase of immigration began in India and Pakistan. Unfortunately, the Kazakhs' problems were not resolved by crossing the Tibetan border into India. They faced very different conditions in the new country. Specifically, the Kazakhs were subjected to unprecedented hostile practices at the Muzaffarabad refugee camp, where they were first settled in India. Camp administrators treated them like prisoners. Food and beverage were inadequate, and even bathing facilities were not provided. When tropical conditions with which the Kazakhs were unfamiliar were added to these problems, diseases and epidemics emerged in the camp, and about a thousand Kazakhs passed away. Indian Muslims had to intervene in this severe situ-

¹⁰ Äbdüuaqap Qara, *Qazaqtardıng Türkiyagha köshı: Qozhan Uäzır Aqsaqaldıng auızsha dereqterı* (Almaty: Orkhon, 2016), 72–74; Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 51–57; Altay, *Altaydan*, 28–31.

¹¹ Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 57–66; Altay, *Altaydan*, 32–57.

ation. Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, a leader of Kashmir Muslims, Nawabzada Rashid Ali Khan, a leader of Punjab Muslims, and Muhammad Aslam Khan, a leader of Garhi Habibullah town Muslims were able to free the Kazakhs from the Muzaffarabad camp with the British authorities' support.¹²

After six months of troubled life, and deaths, in Muzaffarabad, Kazakh immigrants were transferred to the Khanpur camp near the town of Tarnawa in the Hazara division. The transfer was so exciting and emotional that the Kazakhs forgot all their troubles. Learning that Kazakh immigrants would be transferred to Khanpur, indigenous people lined the streets and cheered the migrants. They competed to throw flowers and to give the Kazakhs food and drink. The Khanpur camp provided relative relief. But here, too, epidemic diseases appeared, and dozens died every day. A year later, the British administration gave the Kazakhs refugee identities, with which anyone could leave the camp to settle anywhere. However, the Kazakhs had neither professions nor sufficient money. Where would they go? What would they subsist on outside the camp?

In the meantime, the indigenous people, who noticed the Kazakhs' discomfort, appealed to the authorities to allow them to travel freely on public transport. They also launched campaigns, supported by Muslim leaders in the region, for mass housing construction for the Kazakhs. The Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan married to Durrushehvar Sultan, the daughter of the last Ottoman Caliph, Abdülmecit II, came to the Khanpur camp and promised to give the Kazakhs homes and work.¹³ But as one of the hottest parts of India, Hyderabad was not suitable as a residence for the Kazakhs. The Nizam of Bhopal, Hamidullah Khan, who came to the camp after the Nizam of Hyderabad, made a similar, but more favorable offer. Bhopal was cooler and had more woodland area than Hyderabad, so a group of 500 people led by Qusman Täyzhi [Osman Taştan] settled in the Matar region of Bhopal. Some Kazakhs built mass housing in an outlying Bhopal district, naming it "Kazakabad." Other groups of Kazakhs gradually began to trade in such towns as Lahore, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, and Taxila.¹⁴ After the division of British India in 1947, the Kazakhs settled in Pakistan.¹⁵

¹² Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 69–78; Altay, *Altaydan*, 58–63.

¹³ Äbdüuaqap Qara, "Altaydan Anatoliyagha azap keshu," *Egemen Qazaqstan*, 15 Qazan 1996.

¹⁴ Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 79–81; Altay, *Altaydan*, 63–67.

¹⁵ Altay, *Altaydan*, 74–78.

From 1940 to 1950, the Kazakhs became accustomed to living in India and Pakistan. They also received support from indigenous Muslims.¹⁶ However, they did not feel comfortable because of lingual and cultural differences. Therefore, they wanted to emigrate to Turkey, whose people have the same roots and history.

Turkey comprises the fourth phase of the Kazakh migration. Kazakhs had recourse to the Turkish Embassy in India in 1946, after World War II had ended. However, Turkey was not ready to accept new refugees because, despite not entering the war, the country had not overcome national difficulties caused by the war.¹⁷ After a few years, prominent Kazakhs gathered and agreed to reiterate their demand for emigration to Turkey and the necessity of organizing an association to establish unity and solidarity. Thus, the Eastern Turkistani Qaziq [sic] Refugees Association was established in Peshawar in 1949.¹⁸

As soon as the Association was established, its first task was to list Kazakhs living in various Pakistani cities. Later, this list was delivered to Nebil Batı, the Turkish Ambassador to Pakistan, and the request to migrate to Turkey was forwarded in February 1950. A year later, the response from Ankara reported that Kazakhs would be accepted as immigrants, but that people would have to wait a while for completion of bureaucratic paperwork had to be completed jobs.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the second Kazakh immigration group from Eastern Turkestan came to Kashmir in 1951. This group of Kazakhs was led by Qalibek Äkim [Alibek Hakim], Dälelkhān Zhanaltay [Delilhan Canaltay], Hüseyin Teyci,²⁰ Sultan Şerif Teyci, and Uyghurs under the leadership of İsa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Buğra. These people left for the free world because they did not want to submit to Mao Zedong's new regime instituted by the Communist Revolution in 1949.

¹⁶ The Kazakhs of Turkey can never forget the helpfulness of the Pakistani people. Therefore, they sincerely participated in international aid campaigns for the people of Pakistan when the country was affected by a major earthquake of 7.6 magnitude on October 8, 2005.

¹⁷ Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 83.

¹⁸ Altay, *Altaydan*, 109–10.

¹⁹ Altay, *Altaydan*, 112–14.

²⁰ For this migration, see Saadet Çağatay, *Kazakça Metinler* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1961), 1–4; Hasan Oraltay, *Hürriyet Uğrunda Doğu Türkistan Kazak Türkleri*, 2. bs. (İstanbul: Türk Kültür Yayını, 1976); Khasan Oraltay, *Elīm-aylap ötken ömür* (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1999); Godfrey Lias, *Kazak Exodus* (London: Evans Brothers, 1956). For details on how these migrants assisted a vice-consul of the United States in Urumqi to reach Tibet, see also Thomas Laird, *Into Tibet: The CIA's First Atomic Spy and His Secret Expedition to Lhasa* (New York: Grove Press, 2002).

Kazakhs in Pakistan got in touch with this group and advised them to emigrate together to Turkey.²¹ Alptekin and Buğra went to Ankara and accelerated Turkey's acceptance of these migrants in 1951.²² The Council of Ministers, chaired by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, took the decision on Kazakhs in Pakistan, India, and Kashmir on March 13, 1952. The Turkish government officially recognized them as refugees in Turkey.²³ Kazakhs arrived group after group in Turkey from September 1952 until April 1954. First, they settled in Zeytinburnu, Tuzla, and Sirkeci immigrant guesthouses in Istanbul. Two years later, they were settled in Manisa Salihli, Kayseri Develi, Niğde Altay Köyü, Nevşehir Aksaray, and Konya İsmil. Over time, livelihood difficulties in rural areas caused them to migrate again to Istanbul, especially to the town of Zeytinburnu, their first settlement area.²⁴

An accurate accounting of Kazakh migration to the free world from the base of the Altay mountains is unknown. Various estimates range from 18 to 50 thousand. But the number of those who survived to reach Turkey was only 1,850, meaning that only one person of every ten Kazakhs who wanted to live freely could reach that goal. This immigration for the sake of freedom and the preservation of Kazakh and Muslim identity cost tens of thousands of martyrs.

As a result, we can say that the Kazakh exodus from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey took place in two waves. The first wave was the Kazakhs in Barköl, Qumul, and Altay regions during the period of Sheng Shicai, the Governor of Eastern Turkestan. This migration, starting in the mid-1930s, lasted 17 years and ranged over Gansu, Tibet, India, and Pakistan. In the second wave, Kazakhs emigrated because they did not accept the new regime in China after the Mao Revolution in 1949.

These two immigration movements were certainly not conducted randomly. On the premise of Kazakh leaders, they were carried out in a disciplined and collective manner according to characteristics of Turkic nomadic societies. In this respect, this migration is the latest in mass migration of Turks from Central Asia to the west, beginning from earlier B.C. periods. Kazakh migration leaders' determination of Turkey as the ultimate destination was not accidental but a conscious choice. With

²¹ Qara, "Altaydan Anatoliyagha." For the text of the letter written by Ateyhan Bilgin, the secretary of the association, to the Kazakhs in Kashmir, see Oraltay, *ElİM-aylap*, 187–88.

²² M. Rıza Bekin, *Doğu Türkistan Vakfı Başkanı M. Rıza Bekin'in Anıları* (İstanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2005), 46.

²³ Gayretullah, *Altaylarda*, 85.

²⁴ Qara, "Altaydan Anatoliyagha."

its common language, religion, culture, and history, Turkey was the only country where the Kazakhs did not feel themselves to be foreigners and where their future generations would not lose their national identity.

Consequent to these migrations, Kazakh diasporas emerged in several countries: Turkey, Austria, England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Now, after Kazakhstan's independence, some Kazakh families are returning to their homeland. Their estimated number is about ten thousand. Kazakhstan's private immigrant policy is gradually following the order of five million inhabitants abroad. In about 40 countries is the world's scattered Kazakh diaspora,²⁵ among which those in Turkey consider themselves the happiest because they feel peaceful in all material and spiritual aspects.

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²⁵ Kazakh demographer Maqash Tătımov confirmed that Kazakhs are living in 40 countries of the world. M. B. Tătımov, "Qazaq diasporasınıñ étnodemografiyası zhäne egemen Qazaqstan," in *Qazaq Diasporası*, 56–57.

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